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ABSTRACT

The story presented in this booklet is concerned with the life of an eighty year old Chinese immigrant woman living in Hawaii. The narration provides a brief overview of the woman's birth, childhood, early adulthood in China, and immigration to Hawaii. Her life in Hawaii is described in terms of the work she did, her arranged marriage, her attitudes toward her daughter's marriage and separation, her relationship with her grandchildren, her leisure activities, and her attempts to become an American citizen. A glossary of Chinese terms used in the English text is provided. (EB)

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Ah Dai Comes to Hawaii:

The Story of a Chinese Immigrant Woman

Told by Dai Sen Kam
and
Beverly Kam Wong

To Nancy Foon Young

A production of Ethnic Resource Center for the Pacific
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Glossary

Cheongsam simple one-piece dress with a high collar.

Choong Chinese green onions used to add flavor to main dishes.

Doong gwa Chinese winter melon; large, green, and shaped like a watermelon.

Gai lahn choy Chinese broccoli with long, slender stems and dark green leaves.

Gau steamed pudding in which the basic ingredients are glutinous rice flour, brown sugar, and water.

Hakka one of the many dialectal groups in south China.

Inn wo bird's nest, a Chinese delicacy used in soup. The petrel, a bird that dwells in the cliffs among the islands of Southeast Asia, builds his nest from seaweed which is swallowed, digested and then regurgitated as crystals.

No mai a white, short-grain rice, called mochi by the Japanese which is sticky when cooked.

Siu ahp duck marinated, seasoned with herbs, and roasted in an oven.

Ti Hawaiian plant growing on a tall, narrow, stem-like trunk with cluster of large leaves at the top. Often used to wrap food.

In the heart of Palama district in Honolulu, Hawaii lives an eighty-year-old Chinese woman. Her neighbors know very little about her since she speaks only Chinese and they are Hawaiian, Filipino, Japanese, Portuguese, and Puerto Rican.

She is up and about at sunrise pounding **no mai** flour, weeding her garden, feeding her chickens, and boarding the bus for destinations unknown to her neighbors.

Who is this woman? What has her life been like? This is the story she told me.

他們只見這位老太太日常總是忙碌不堪，日出時候她就起來舂糯米粉，又在院子裡除草、餵雞，接着就搭公共汽車不知到哪裡去了。

這位大嬸究竟是什麼人？她的身世怎樣？下文就是這位大嬸對我口述的故事。

She was born in Sa Buhn village, Chungshan, Kwangtung province, China, in 1894. Her parents, who worked as farmers for the village landlord, named her Dai, which means "bring," in hopes the gods would next bring them a son.

Ah Dai, as she was called, tried hard to make her mother and father happy to have her. A cheery, round face and constant chatter brought smiles to all around. She could not go to school because it cost money, and it seemed unnecessary for a girl who would eventually marry and neither bring home her wages nor carry on the family name of Sen.

Helping her mother in the landlord's house, she cooked, cleaned and ran errands. At twelve, she worked in the landlord's fields with her father. There was little time for play, but Ah Dai did not complain.

When she was seventeen, her father told Ah Dai that he had found a husband for her from the nearby Kam village. A man named Kam Ki had just returned from a faraway place she had never heard of — Hawaii. The Chinese called the place Tan Heong Shan, or Fragrant Sandalwood Mountains, for at one time a lot of sandalwood was brought from Hawaii to China.

Kam Ki and his family were **Hakka.** His father had traveled to Hawaii as a sugar plantation worker in the late 1880s. He had worked hard, saving pennies from his wages of thirteen dollars a month and bought land in Waipahu to grow rice. He left China a young immigrant worker without any money. He returned to his home village a rich man. He bought large parcels of land and built adjoining homes for each of the four sons who had returned with him.

Ah Dai's heart was filled with hope. She had no say in choosing her husband and had to respect her parents' wishes. She had nothing, but now she was marrying into a family of much wealth. She felt happy because she would finally bring great honor to her hard-working mother and father.

Life in the Kam family was not what Ah Dai had expected. Her husband's parents had chosen her having heard that she was a good worker. Instead of a life of leisure, Ah Dai worked just as she had done as a young girl. She plowed the fields, planted rice, and pulled weeds. Each of the other women in the family had her own chores too. One did the cooking and cleaning, while another took care of the children. Although each brother had separate living quarters for his family, they all ate and worked together as a single household.

Kam Ki and his brothers were discouraged with the never-ending work. At night they would talk of Hawaii and how with less effort they could earn more and really enjoy life there. Although she had never been there, Ah Dai knew that Hawaii must be a wonderful place. Whenever relatives returned, they brought back many good things to eat — chocolate, gum, coffee, ham, and bacon.

One by one the brothers returned to Hawaii. When it was Kam Ki's turn in 1924, Ah Dai wanted to take their two children and go with him. But she was needed to work in the family's fields. With a heavy heart, Ah Dai watched her husband leave without her.

Kam Ki returned to his village every few years. Their child, a daughter named Kim Hung, was born during one of his year-long visits. Kam Ki wanted to stay in his homeland with his family, but times were hard. There was more opportunity in Hawaii, so again he departed.

Finally in 1939 Kam Ki sent for Ah Dai. This time she was free to go as her two oldest children already had families of their own, and they could take care of the fields.

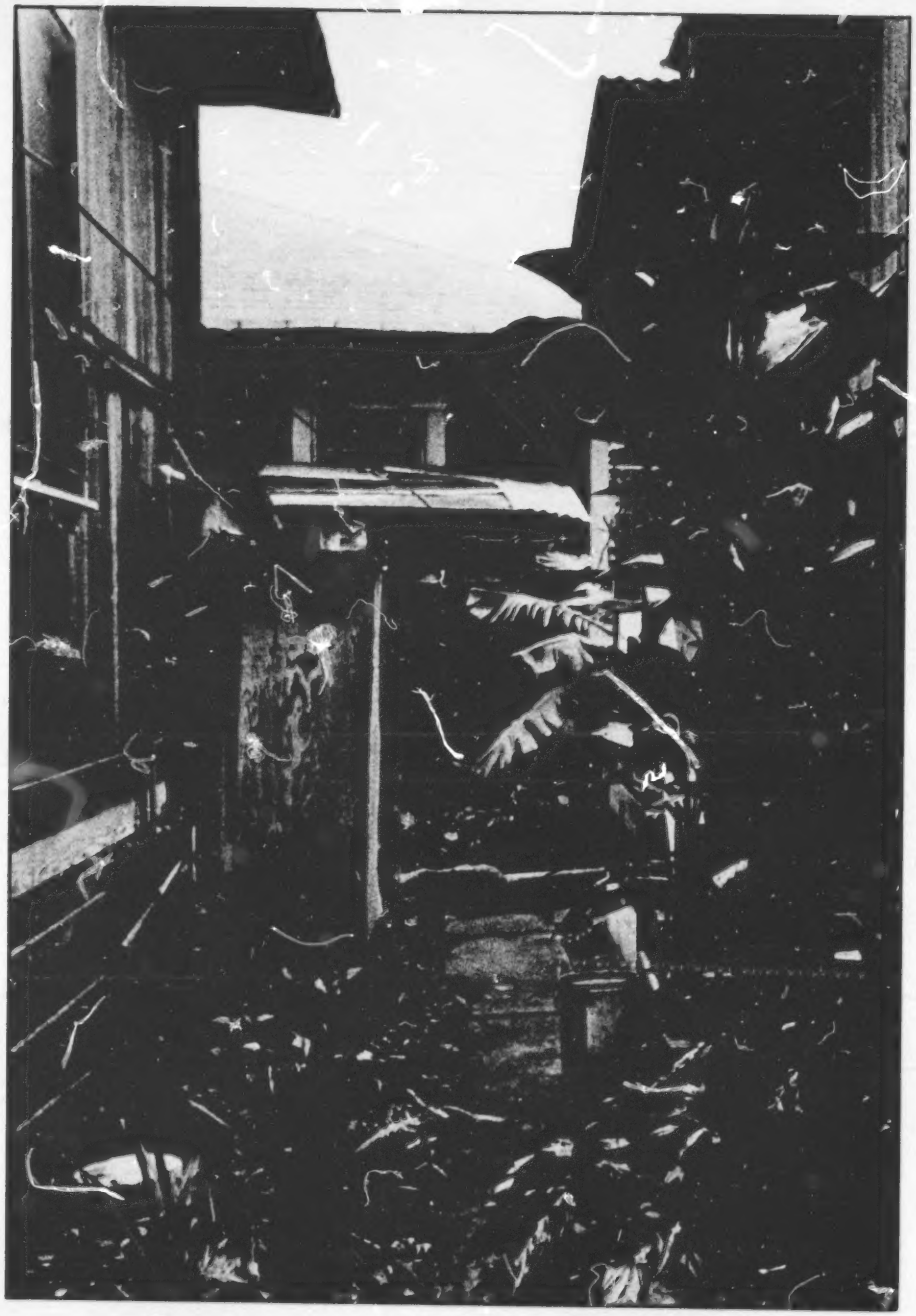
Only five-year-old Kim Hung accompanied her. China was in the midst of war. Japanese soldiers had invaded the country and were watching very closely. Ah Dai and Kim Hung fled their homeland, traveling on foot by night and hiding in caves by day.

不久，她們抵達澳門，然後乘船到香港。等了一年才辦好了移民紙，買了船票，登上了一古列治總統」號客輪。她們搭的是擠迫的大艙位，但船上的華籍管房對阿帶特別照顧，每晚都送些額外的食物給她，阿帶就把那些食物拿出來和同艙的華籍乘客一起去吃。

一路上，阿帶担心日本飛機會來扔炸彈。一九四一年三月八日，船抵檀香山海港，她很感激菩薩對她的庇祐。船靠碼頭後，阿帶還不能夠立即和丈夫見面，因為她們母女二人要受檢疫隔離一星期。從檢疫站出來後，阿帶才放下了心頭的大石。

When they reached Macao, they boarded a boat to Hong Kong where they had to wait a year to get immigration papers and book passage on the *President Coolidge*. Although they slept in cramped quarters in the steerage class of the ship, the Chinese steward liked Ah Dai, and brought extra food to her each night which she shared with the other Chinese people around her.

Ah Dai worried that the ship would be bombed throughout the voyage. She thanked the gods when they reached Honolulu Harbor on March 8, 1941. When they docked in Honolulu, Ah Dai could not immediately join her husband. She and Kim Hung had to stay at the quarantine station for a week. Ah Dai felt relieved when they were released.



Ah Dai's husband was now a mechanic's helper at Pearl Harbor, earning two hundred dollars a month. They rented a home from Kam Ki's older brother in the Palama District near Chinatown. It was a tumble-down shack. There were only two rooms — a bedroom, and one big room that served as living, dining, and kitchen area. They took their baths and washed clothes in a separate shack. They cooked their meals on a kerosene stove and there was no hot running water. Ah Dai would have liked to live in a nicer home but here the rent was only twenty dollars a month.

With such low rent, Ah Dai could put a little money away each month so that someday they could build a home of their own. Ah Dai's dream was to have their own home where they would not fear the landlord raising the rent or chasing them out.

為了可以早日買房子，阿帶決定出去做工。金杏此時已改了個英文名字叫做「貝弗利」，並且進了「力其力其小學」讀書，離家只有幾個街口遠，因此阿帶白天就有空了。

靠朋友的介紹，她在車埠找到一份做廚的工作，薪水很低。後來聽說夏威夷蒲廠要請人削蒲蘆，每小時六十仙，她就趕快去申請。

Hoping to buy a house as soon as possible, Ah Dai decided to go to work. Kim Hung, now called Beverly, was at Likelike Elementary School just a few blocks from home so Ah Dai was free during the daytime.

Through friends she got a job as a cook in Chinatown. Although she did not mind the work as a cook, the pay was low. When she heard that Hawaiian Pineapple Company was hiring pine trimmers at sixty cents an hour, she quickly applied for the job.

她在菠蘿廠一做就做了十二年。這種工作是單調的，而且管工的女人又嚴。但是阿帶自問沒有學識，這種薪水對她來說實在已算不錯了。同時，她又很快地和那些跟她一道工作的其他華籍女工交上朋友，其中有一位——萬露亞阿姆——，成了阿帶日後的多年好友。她和阿帶年紀相近，是住在萬露谷的一位婦人。

She worked at the pineapple cannery for twelve years. Work was monotonous and the forelady was very strict, but Ah Dai felt that the wages were good for a woman with no education. Besides, she quickly made friends with other Chinese ladies working there. "Manoa Ah Moo," a woman who lived in Manoa Valley, was her age and was to be her best friend for years to come.

Ah Dai's working hours at the cannery varied with the pineapple season so she looked for other ways to earn money. Near her home she found some land that was not being used. Ah Dai got permission to use the land without charge as long as she paid the water bill. Ah Dai was happy. Even though she did not own the land, she could grow **gai lahn choy,** Chinese broccoli; **choong,** green onions; **doong gwa,** winter melon, and other vegetables to sell at Chinatown markets.

She spent hours in the field and under her care, harvests were good. She was thankful that she had learned how to take care of plants from her father in China years before. Each harvest brought her closer to her goal of owning a home.

Finally, in 1950 Ah Dai felt she had enough money for a down payment on a house. She and Kam Ki bought land just around the corner from their present house. Their new home had a bathroom, living room, two bedrooms, and a kitchen large enough to have their meals there.

Best of all, there was a large space beneath the house where she could pound and sift her **no mai** flour, sort and weigh her vegetables, and make Chinese delicacies. There was even enough land for a chicken coop and a garden in the back yard.

最後，到了一九五零年，阿帶覺得已有足夠的錢去買房子付首期了。她和丈夫商量結果，就在離家不遠的地方買了一塊地。他們的新住宅有一個大廳、一個浴室、兩個睡房，和一個大得可以做飯廳的廚房。

最理想之處，就是這間新住宅的底層有很大的空地給她舂糯米粉、篩粉、挑選蔬菜、造糕點。此外，後院又有大幅空地可以做雞舍和菜園。

阿帶覺得她所完成的第二件大事就是女兒金香在一九五七年結婚。阿帶的女婿黃德海不懂中國話，這事令她有點不安。但這位青年的父親是道威島限拿禮埠的華校教員，有這樣良好云身的女婿，阿帶還是覺得值得高興的。

阿帶的兩個外孫分別在一九五八年和一九六零年出生，這使她非常開心。她也有其他孫兒在中國出生，可惜和他們從未見面，而且相信將來也難有相見的機會了。

Ah Dai's next great feeling of accomplishment came when Beverly married in 1957. Ah Dai was a bit disturbed because Beverly's husband, Dick Hoy Wong, could not speak Chinese, but she was pleased because he was from a good family. Dick's father was an educated man who had been a Chinese school teacher at Hanalei on the island of Kauai.

Ah Dai felt proud when her grandsons were born in 1958 and 1960. She had other grandchildren in China but she had never seen them and did not think she ever would.

When Kam Ki died in 1962, Ah Dai felt lonely. He had been a good husband. While she had worked in her vegetable field, he had taken care of the house and had prepared the meals. He often cooked the foods that Ah Dai liked — **ngee chee,** shark's fin; **inn woh,** bird's nest; or **siu ahp,** roast duck. Occasionally he had bought her jade earrings and rings or a piece of silk material for a **cheongsam,** dress, to wear on special occasions.

But Kam Ki had not been a man without his faults. He liked to go to the movies. He liked to play Chinese dominoes. He had spoiled Beverly and had wanted to let her go out with her friends whenever she wanted to. Ah Dai did not agree with Kam Ki on any of these matters. She thought these activities were a waste of time. Oh, the arguments they had!

但他現在已撒手而去了。金杏起初帶了丈夫和孩子們來和阿帶一起住，後來又邀請阿帶到他們鹹湖區（在檀香山西部）的家去住，但阿帶並不覺得愉快。她只能和女兒交談，因為女婿和兩個外孫都不懂中國話。女兒也不教孩子們說中國話，他們也就認為自己是美國人，不是中國人。

阿帶也不了解女兒和女婿做甚麼工作，只覺得他們好像是把體育運動看得很重要。女婿對孩子們的體育最熱心：孩子們放學後，他就去當他們的教練和球証，安排他們練球。後來這兩個孩子中的老大成為中學裡的足球隊隊員。

Now he was gone.
Beverly and her family tried living with Ah Dai for a while and later invited Ah Dai to live with them in their home in Salt Lake subdivision, west Honolulu. Ah Dai did not feel comfortable. She could speak only with Beverly because neither Dick nor the children spoke Chinese. Beverly did not teach the children Chinese, and they feel they are American, not Chinese.

Ah Dai did not understand what kind of work Dick and Beverly did, and it seemed that sports were the most important things in their lives. Dick was always involved in his sons' sports activities, coaching, refereeing, and managing their after-school games. Later the older son became a high school football player.

雖然阿帶和女婿一家人存在著這許多文化上的差異，她還是歡迎他們到訪的。她喜歡和孩子們在一起。每逢外孫們來幫她抹門窗，打掃庭院，或只是來看電視，她也會感到高興的。

每年全家都有幾次帶母親去神廟酬神。酬神用的祭品包括戲士尼酒，雞和一些特製的食物。阿帶在家酬神的時候，她很高興看到外孫女麗容學她在祭品前拜拜，雖然這個不懂事的孩子一直在問「現在可以吃了嗎？」這孩子對打過年過節的可口的點心（蒸糕月餅之類）總是急不及待地嚷着要吃的。

Although there are cultural differences, she looks forward to their visits. Ah Dai enjoys the children as they help wash windows, clean the yard, or just watch television.

Several times a year Beverly takes Ah Dai to the Chinese temple where they give offerings of whiskey, chicken, and other special foods. Ah Dai is pleased when Beverly's third child, Kimberly, bows before the offerings at home even though she keeps asking, "Can I eat now?" while she is bowing. Kimberly cannot wait to eat the delicious festival foods, like **gao**, pudding, and moon cakes.

阿帶能够在夏威夷開枝散葉和安居樂業，她是感激的。過去她雖然勞碌了許多年頭，現在她已经毋須為前途着想而攢節金錢了。前途已经在這裡了，因為她少女時代的願望都已一一實現了。她的房子已经付清了款，她每個月收到政府的社會（生活）保障津貼，又可以從賣菜和賣雞賺些額外的收入。她又曾经積蓄過足够的錢去香港和加拿大遊玩。

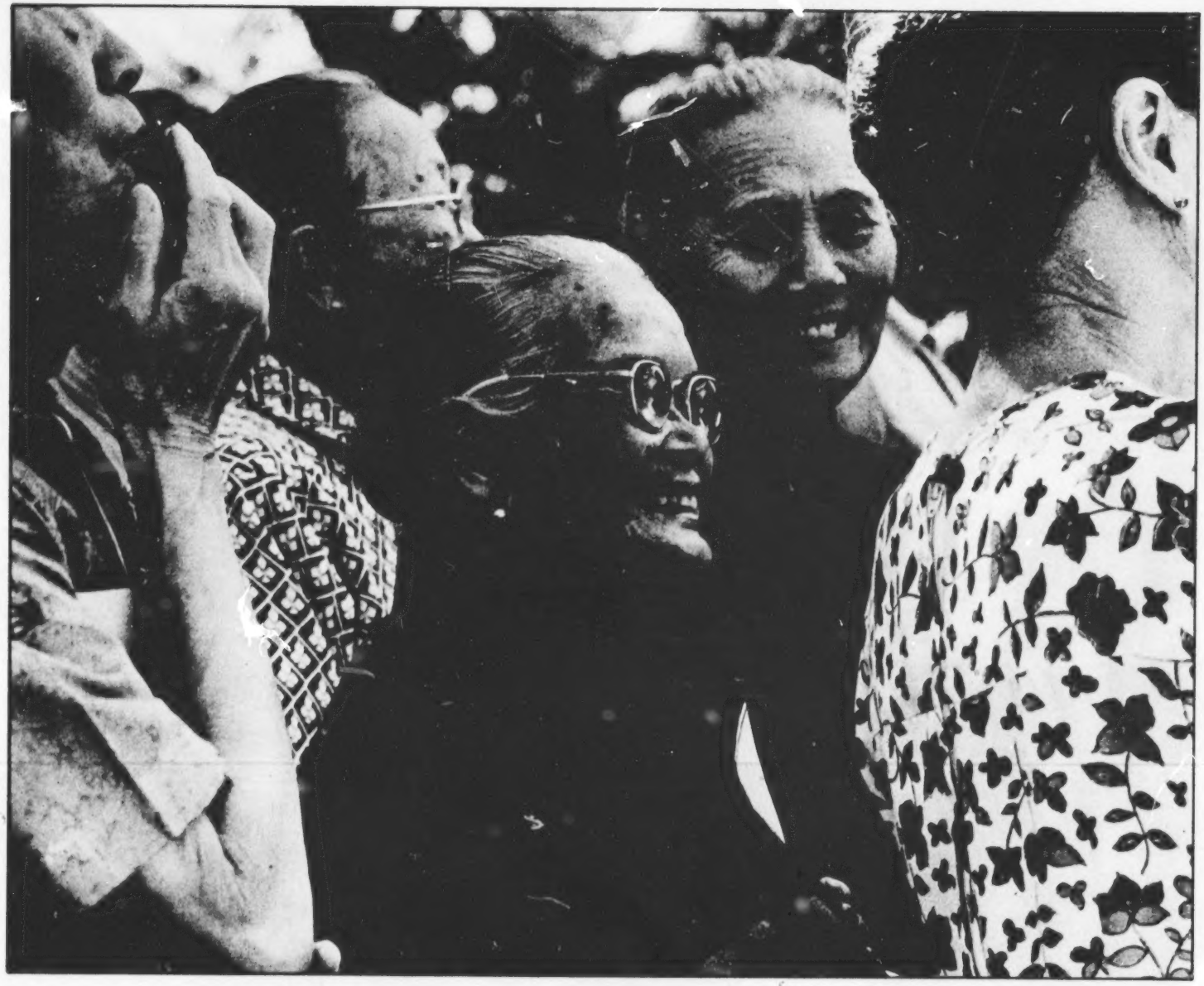
Ah Dai is thankful for her small family and for her good life in Hawaii. Although she has worked hard through the years, she no longer has to save for the future. The future is here and she has achieved all the things she had hoped for as a little girl. Her house is all paid for. She receives monthly paychecks from the government for social security and earns extra spending money by selling her chickens and vegetables. She even saved enough to travel to Hong Kong and Canada.

Some of the simple pleasures Ah Dai enjoys are meeting Manoa Ah Moo in Chinatown to see Chinese movies or meeting other friends for the free lunch for senior citizens at Palama Settlement. Sometimes in the evening she talks with her friends on the telephone for hours. She could not do that if she lived with her daughter Beverly! Besides that, Beverly's home is too far from Chinatown and all Ah Dai's friends.

Her one regret is that she never had the chance to go to school. She has to rely on her friends or on Beverly to read and write her letters.

在簡樸的生活之中，阿帶也有一些可樂的事，例如到華埠去和「萬慮亞阿姆」一起去看中國電影，或是到巴麻麻社會服務中心去和其他朋友參加老人午膳會的免費午餐。有時，在晚上，她和朋友們通電話閒談，一談就幾小時。如果她和女兒同住，這一件事就絕對辦不到。何況女兒住的地方離華埠太遠，離阿帶的朋友們太遠。

阿帶有一件感到終生遺憾的事，就是自幼沒有機會入學校。她必須靠女兒或別人的幫忙才能夠看親友們寄來的信或回信。



She is sure that if she had had an education, she would be able to pass the examination to become an American citizen.

She has taken and failed the test three times. But she still hopes that someday she can become a citizen of the country she has grown to love and which has enabled her to achieve her dreams.

Ah Dai's language is Chinese. This book is printed the Chinese way, so it opens from the other side. The Chinese invented paper and printing; therefore the oldest books in the world were printed that way. Turn the book over--the story of Ah Dai begins there.